

A *Hand. 23.*
D I S C O U R S E,
I N T W O P A R T S,

U P O N
I S A I A H, CHAP. VII. VER. 14, 15, 16.

P R E A C H E D B E F O R E T H E
U N I V E R S I T Y O F C A M B R I D G E,
O N

S U N D A Y, D E C E M. 24, 1780,

B Y T. POSTLETHWAITE, B.D. *12*
F E L L O W O F T R I N I T Y C O L L E G E.

C A M B R I D G E,

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Churchyard, London.

M D C C L X X I.



TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE
E D W A R D,
E A R L O F D E R B Y,
THE FOLLOWING
D I S C O U R S E,
AS A TESTIMONY OF THE AUTHOR'S
GRATITUDE AND RESPECT,
IS HUMBLY INSCRIBED,
B Y H I S L O R D S H I P'S
MOST OBLIGED
AND DUTIFUL SERVANT,

*Trin. Coll. Cam.
Jan. 29, 1781.*

T. POSTLETHWAITE.

TO THE RIGHT HONORABLE

E. D. W. A. R. D.

OF A. R. D. OF D. R. D. Y.

THE FOLLOWING

D. I. C. O. U. R. D.

AS A TESTIMONY OF

GRATITUDE AND

IS HUMBLY

BY THE

MOST

AND

TO THE

D I S C O U R S E.

P A R T I.

ISAIAH vii. 14, 15, 16.

THEREFORE THE LORD HIMSELF SHALL GIVE YOU A SIGN;
BEHOLD, A VIRGIN SHALL CONCEIVE AND BEAR A SON,
AND SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL:—BUTTER
AND HONEY SHALL HE EAT, THAT HE MAY KNOW TO RE-
FUSE THE EVIL AND CHOOSE THE GOOD:—FOR BEFORE
THE CHILD SHALL KNOW TO REFUSE THE EVIL AND CHOOSE
THE GOOD, THE LAND THAT THOU ABHORREST SHALL BE
FORSAKEN OF BOTH HER KINGS.

THE completion of prophecies has ever been considered
as their best interpreter; and many of them undoubt-
edly, which were obscure and imperfectly understood at the
time they were delivered, have become intelligible and of easy
application by their accomplishment. But perhaps we may find

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reason

reason to suspect that the important prophecy in my text has not yet appeared to be of that number. Some of its characters indeed are so express and pointed, that they cannot be mistaken. IMMANUEL, born of a pure VIRGIN, will confessedly apply to none but Christ. — But though his miraculous birth has so signally marked the person prophesied of; yet the various interpretations of expositors, perplexed with the subtle doctrine of double senses, have involved the true meaning, object, and application of the prophecy in perhaps more than it's original obscurity; and have almost left it doubtful, whether it has in fact any relation to the person of Christ.

Minutely to examine and refute the several explications that have been given of this passage, is both unnecessary and useless. If we can discover it's true interpretation, we need not much concern ourselves with those that are false or groundless. I will, however, beg leave to offer to your consideration one objection, which equally and (I think) unanswerably militates against them all; because it contests the following principle, which they all equally adopt: that *though the secondary or the remote object of the prophecy might be the person of Christ; yet it's primary and immediate object was to persuade and convince Abaz, that he should assuredly be delivered from the destruction he was threatened with by the confederate kings of Syria and Samaria.* The objection, which is neither more nor less than a direct contradiction of this commonly received opinion, I will endeavour to illustrate by an example.

When

When God commanded Moses to announce to the children of Israel their deliverance from the Egyptian bondage, and to conduct them into the promised land; struck with the danger and difficulty of the enterprize, Moses expostulated with God, and tried, by every argument he could think of, to wave the commission. Amongst other objections, he urged that he should not find credit even amongst the Israelites themselves; “Behold, said he, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice; for they will say, the Lord hath not appeared unto thee. And the Lord said unto him, What is that in thine hand? And he said, A Rod. And God said, Cast it on the ground: and he cast it on the ground, and it became a Serpent; and Moses fled from before it. And the Lord said, Put forth thine hand, and take it by the tail. And he put forth his hand and caught it, and it became a Rod in his hand.” Here is a Miracle wrought, a *Sign* exhibited, sufficient to remove every doubt and scruple, and to give Moses himself full assurance of the success of his enterprize. This and other *Signs* he is directed to do in the sight of the people, that they might believe that the Lord God of their fathers had appeared unto him. The event was what might well be expected. When the people saw the *Signs* they believed, and in confident gratitude to God for this divine visitation, they bowed their heads and worshipped.

Let us now turn our attention to the history of my text, and try whether we can discover any analogy between the

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dealings

dealings of God towards Ahaz and towards the Israelites in Egypt, in circumstances (upon the abovementioned principle) not very dissimilar.

Rezin and Pekah, the confederate kings of Syria and Samaria, had invaded Judah with a powerful army. Their purpose was to dethrone Ahaz, and to place his sceptre in the hands of the son of *Tabeal*. Alarmed at his imminent danger, and apparently destitute of every human means of resisting the invaders, Ahaz trembled not only for his crown, but for his existence; and seems to have considered the utter destruction of himself and of his house as inevitable. In this distress, God commands Isaiah to go to the affrighted king, and to take with him his son SHEAR-JASHUB. These words in the original import, that a remnant shall return; and the child being introduced to Ahaz under this name, was plainly a *Symbolical Promise* to him, that his enemies should not finally prevail, nor effectually execute their malicious intentions against himself and his house: that though their wickedness and impiety might provoke God to visit them with many and great afflictions, yet they should not be delivered over to utter excision; there should still be a *Remnant* in which God would faithfully and signally fulfil his promises to his servant David*. But
this

* This explication is perfectly agreeable to the conditional promises of God to David, that his posterity, if obedient, should continue to possess his throne; if disobedient, should be chastened with the rod of men; but that his mercy should not depart from David, as it did from Saul, so that his house should be extinct. And
it

this is not all; the prophet in the name of the Lord warns Ahaz, in express terms, to take heed and be quiet, not to fear nor be fainthearted for the fierce anger of the confederate kings, or their evil counsel against him; for thus saith the Lord, it shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass. All this seems to have made but a weak impression upon the trembling monarch: distracted with doubts and apprehensions, he paid no regard to the admonitions of the prophet, nor reposed any confidence in his positive promises of protection from the Almighty. The Lord therefore spake again by his prophet unto Ahaz, saying, "Ask thee a *Sign* of the Lord thy God, ask it "either in the depth, or in the height above." This solemn offer staggered the doubting king, and even the presumptuous incredulity of Ahaz shrunk back at the thought of requiring from God himself that extreme test of his veracity. "I will "not ask, said he, neither will I tempt the Lord." The prophet then addressing himself to the whole house of David, and to Ahaz as the head of it, after warmly reproving them for their impious distrust in the promises of God, proclaims, "There-
fore the Lord himself shall give you a *Sign*." — If we ask,
for

it seems probable, that Shear-jashub is here intended to be a symbolical declaration to Ahaz of the determined purpose of God to punish him and his house, if they persisted in their disobedience and impiety, with the utmost severity, till by the sword and captivity they should be reduced to a *remnant*, but that a *remnant* should however be preserved. 2 Sam. vii. 12 — 16. — 1 Kings ii. 4. — viii. 25. Psalm lxxxix. 28, &c. &c.

for what purpose? Expositors will tell us, to convince Ahaz of the certainty of his deliverance. Must we not then expect some miracle to be wrought, some *Rod* to be turned into a *Serpent*, some *Sign* to be exhibited sufficient to force conviction upon the unbelieving king? for we have seen that he would not yield his belief either to the symbolical or express declarations of the prophet: nay, Ahaz seems to have been in the very state and temper in which Moses expected to find the children of Israel, full of belief that the Lord had not spoken to the prophet. Let us try then whether we can discover in my text any traces of such miracle or *sign*, as might convince Ahaz that more than an arm of flesh was stretched out for his immediate deliverance.

“Behold a VIRGIN shall conceive and bear a *Son*, and shall call his name IMMANUEL.” — An extraordinary miracle, no doubt! but it is only foretold, and did not take place in fact till many centuries after Ahaz: nay, Ahaz has no assurance that it ever will happen, but the bare word of the prophet, to which we have seen how little he was disposed to give credit. This remote event therefore, however miraculous, could be no *Sign* to Ahaz of an immediate deliverance; unless we will suppose that his trust and confidence in the prophet’s veracity, would increase and keep pace with the strangeness and incredibility of his predictions.

“Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil and choose the good.” Here surely is nothing wonderful,

derful, that a child should be nourished with mild or delicate food, so well suited to it's tender years.

“ For before the child shall know to refuse the evil and “ choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be for- “ faken of both her kings.” Here again Ahaz has only the prophet's word, unauthenticated by any miracle, that his deliverance shall take place before the child shall become capable of distinguishing good from evil.

If we soften the terms of the text and understand it as some do — Behold a woman that is now a virgin shall marry, shall conceive, and bear a son, whose name IMMANUEL marks him as an express type of the Messiah. He shall be nourished with the common food of infants; but before he shall become capable of distinguishing good from evil, thy deliverance shall be accomplished by the destruction of thine enemies. Here every symptom of a miracle is lost. The *Sign*, so solemnly promised from God himself, is degraded into a mere *Verbal* promise of the prophet; to which Ahaz would pay little regard, unless he was now become more credulous than the Israelitish slaves in Egypt, who would not yield their belief to any thing short of a decided miracle.

It is clear to a demonstration, that the typical interpretation of the prophecy could not contribute any thing to Ahaz's conviction. Those indeed who live under the light of the gospel, and can find in my text a child prophetically promised to Ahaz in terms so lofty and mystical, as could never yet be literally applied.

applied to any but the great Saviour of the world, may thence (perhaps with some appearance of reason) deduce an argument well calculated to confirm their own faith in Christ. They may discover, or imagine to themselves at least, a relation between type and antitype. They may find Christ foretold and prefigured in this typical infant, and may conceive that as the birth of the latter, though but in the common course of nature, was to be the happy omen and forerunner of Ahaz's deliverance, so the miraculous birth of the former should be the beginning of a much greater deliverance, even the salvation of mankind. But Ahaz was undoubtedly ignorant of this typical relation. He was not informed of it by the prophet, nor could it possibly be within the reach of the human understanding to discover it, till the miraculous birth of Christ gave occasion to apply literally to him a description which could not be applied, unless in a figurative, or in a very inferior and humble sense, to any child born in the days of Ahaz.

But supposing that the prophet had expressly informed Ahaz of this typical relation; yet he could not thence have derived any sure ground of present hope or confidence, unless he had inverted the order of typical inference; argued from the antitype to the type; from the future, but distant, birth of the Messiah, to the birth of a child that was immediately to take place; and concluded that as the former, after the lapse of many centuries, would usher into the world redemption and salvation to mankind, so the latter would be to himself a sure pledge of present

present safety and deliverance from his enemies. However strange and inadmissible this reasoning may appear, yet disguised under the colouring of sophistry it is the substance of some specious explications of my text.

Let us now then suppose Ahaz thus to argue the matter with the prophet.

You tell me that I shall assuredly be delivered from the dangers that now so nearly threaten me. But my situation and circumstances are so distressful and desperate, that such a deliverance seems almost, if not altogether, hopeless and incredible.

You assume the sacred character of a prophet; you charge me in the name of the Lord to take heed and be quiet; and to repose, without fear or dismay, my reliance upon God for protection. Would you then persuade me presumptuously to expect to be saved by a miracle; while I am neglecting every human means of safety which providence has already entrusted to my direction?

You bid me then to ask of God a Sign, even such an one as I myself may think sufficient to evince the dignity of your character, and the certainty of my deliverance. But if you bear indeed the high commission you pretend to, I dare not challenge God to so dangerous a display of his power; and I fear to offend him by even seeming to repose confidence in a vain pretender.

You announce that the Lord himself therefore shall give me a Sign. But what is that mighty Sign? A child shall be born; and that must be a Sign to me that my deliverance shall take place before it can learn to distinguish good from evil. Is then the birth of a

B

child

child an event so wonderful as to manifest an extraordinary interposition of the Almighty? Shew me indeed a child born without the concurrence of a human father, and I will confess the finger of God: but while you pretend to assert the high dignity of your character by promising me a *Sign* from God, and yet refer me only to the common occurrences of every day's experience, I cannot but suspect that your pretensions are vain and groundless. Cease then to trouble me with your idle admonitions. Leave me quietly to discharge my duty to my country; and, as far as is in my power, to guard against the dangers that now threaten her, either by a prudent exertion of her natural force, or by inviting the assistance of such powerful allies as may afford some prospect of defeating the malicious designs of my inveterate enemies.

I cannot see (upon the common hypothesis) what the prophet could oppose to this reasoning of Ahaz: and we may therefore, I think, safely conclude, that the object of the prophecy could not be in any sense (*primary or secondary, express or typical*) to convince Ahaz of the certainty of his deliverance; and that in fact no miracle was wrought, no *Sign* exhibited, which could possibly impress him with* such an expectation.

* I have hitherto considered the Prophet as addressing himself personally to Ahaz; though in the thirteenth verse he expressly addresses himself to the house of David in the plural number, and continues that plural address in the fourteenth verse, and only changes to Ahaz in the singular in the sixteenth verse. But this, I conceive, is not of much consequence. The house of David and Ahaz were involved in the same dan-

ger, they were equally alarmed with it, and equally apprehensive that the success of the confederate Kings would be the extinction of that house. Now the very same arguments, which tend to prove that the object of the prophecy could not be to convince *Abaz* of the certainty of *His* deliverance, and that no *Miracle* or *Sign* was exhibited, which could possibly impress *Him* with such an expectation, will be equally cogent to prove, that the object of the prophecy could not be to convince the *House of David* of the certainty of *Their* deliverance; and that no *Miracle* or *Sign* was exhibited, which could possibly impress *Them* with such an expectation.

This difference of address is by some however thought very material; but I think without (or rather contrary to) reason, if from thence it be inferred, that the two predictions in my text are to be considered not only as distinct, but as absolutely unconnected with, and unrelated to, each other; the prediction of the birth of *Immanuel* being addressed to the *house of David*, and that of the destruction of the *confederate Kings* to *Abaz* only. For this total separation deprives both of all mutual support, and leaves them no other influence but what was derived from the prophetic character and authority of *Isaiah*. This, when the prophecy was delivered, must have been extremely weak and inconsiderable: for his person and character were plainly held in little or no estimation, either by *Ahaz* or the house of *David*. The former had already betrayed a manifest distrust of the veracity of the Prophet, when he expressly foretold, that the purpose of the confederate Kings “should not stand, neither should it come to pass:” and of the latter the Prophet, in his address to them, bitterly complains, that they “wearied not only Men but God,” undoubtedly by their *Disobedience*, *Unbelief* and *Idolatry*; the very crimes for which *Ahaz* was notorious.

It is therefore, I think, plain that the change of address is only intended as a mark of scorn and resentment against *Ahaz* for his perverse unbelief; and to introduce, with an air of greater solemnity, a serious expostulation with the house of *David* upon their multiplied offences. This expostulation bears a great resemblance to those of God with their rebellious ancestors in the Wilderness: and we shall presently see that, like them, it concludes with a most unequivocal demonstration of his protecting care over that ungrateful house, even with holding out to them a miraculous *Sign* for their conviction,

D I S C O U R S E.

P A R T II.

AN eminent prelate, in his new translation of the prophecy of Ifaiah, has in my text adopted a reading recommended by a learned Friend; who begins his defence of it with complaining, that “ though so much has been written “ upon this important passage, there is an obscurity and in- “ consequence which still attends it in the general run of all “ the interpretations given to it by the most learned.” It had been well if he had been as happy in removing, as he was right in remarking, this obscurity. But his exposition, besides being clogged with most of the difficulties that may justly be objected to preceding ones, has unfortunately made the prophet inconsistent with himself, and the prophecy inapplicable to the person of Christ.

The most material difference between his and former expositions arises from translating a Hebrew particle in the fifteenth verse by the word *WHEN*, instead of *THAT*. In the common version we read, “ Butter and honey shall he eat *that* “ he may know to refuse the evil and choose the good;”
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in the new one, "Butter and honey shall he eat *when* he shall know to refuse what is evil and to choose what is good." Here we are told that butter and honey are delicacies in the east, and therefore put to denote a state of plenty. If then we consider my text as a prediction of the birth of Christ and of his condition of life, we must understand that from the time of his emerging out of a state of infancy, *when* he should be capable of distinguishing good from evil, he should eat butter and honey, he should live in plenty and abundance, in the enjoyment of delicacies and luxuries. I may refer you to the evangelists for information, how far this description is applicable to our Redeemer.

But if we interpret the text of a child then shortly to be born; whose birth was to be a *Sign* to Ahaz of his approaching deliverance from his enemies; the meaning will be, that this child, *when* he should be capable of distinguishing good from evil, should live in the midst of plenty. The reason, we are told, is assigned in the sixteenth verse; because before that time the confederate kings of Syria and Samaria, who then desolated the land of Judah, should be destroyed, and the blessings of peace and plenty be again restored. The destruction of those kings actually took place in the third or fourth year of Ahaz's reign. Ahaz reigned sixteen years. Therefore according to this learned person's exposition, the prophet, to comfort and encourage Ahaz, here foretels to him, that the land of Judah shall enjoy peace, prosperity, and abundance of
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all good things in the last ten or twelve years of his reign. But in the verses immediately following my text, the prophet flatters Ahaz with no such hopes. He there tells him that the Lord shall bring upon him, and upon his people, and upon his father's house, days that have not come, from the day that Ephraim departed from Judah. That he and his people shall be afflicted and distressed, the land waste and barren, and it's most fertile parts uncultivated and overrun with briers and thorns. In short, Isaiah has used expressions, strong as prophetic language could furnish, to describe the misery and desolation of that devoted country in the days of Ahaz. The history of Ahaz's reign, in the book of chronicles, but too faithfully resembles this uncomfortable picture.

From these observations I would draw the following short inference, by way of apology for offering any thing to your consideration upon a passage, which has already been the subject of so much discussion. The imperfections in this learned person's exposition, and his complaints of obscurity in all preceding ones, afford a strong presumption that my text is not yet rightly understood, and therefore it cannot be thought impertinent or needless to attempt a more intelligible and consistent explication of it.

The great source of the obscurity complained of is, I apprehend, a misconception of the object and design of the prophecy. Interpreters universally represent it as spoken to Ahaz to persuade and convince him that he should assuredly
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be delivered from an invasion which then menaced him with utter destruction *.

Having already attempted to refute this opinion, I will now endeavour to shew you that it had a very different object.

That it is a distinct and literal prediction of the birth of Christ, unembarrassed with double senses :

That it is descriptive (in part at least) both of his dignity and humiliation :

That it neither had nor was meant to have any completion but in his person :

And that a Sign (a miraculous Sign, if the literal prediction of future events be miraculous) is therein held out to Abaz and the house of David, not only to evince to them the certainty of this extraordinary birth, but to inspire them with an assured hope and expectation that the line of David should never fail till this wonderful prophecy had received it's full accomplishment.

After what has been said, I am persuaded that a simple paraphrase of my text will afford a very satisfactory evidence of every one of these assertions. But I must first beg leave to make a small alteration in our common translation. It will not, I hope, be thought an unpardonable liberty, if I venture to translate a Hebrew article which occurs in two *material* places of my text by the same English article in both places. Before VIRGIN in the fourteenth verse, the Hebrew article is translated

* Or to the House of David to persuade and convince *them* that *They* should assuredly be delivered from an invasion which then menaced *them* with utter destruction.

lated by the English indefinite article (A): Behold A VIRGIN shall conceive. In the sixteenth verse before CHILD the same Hebrew article is translated by the definite article (THE): For before THE CHILD. This reading evidently restrains the interpretation of this verse to the child just spoken of in the fourteenth and fifteenth verses. I would here again translate it by the indefinite article, and read, For before A CHILD. This will leave us at liberty (and I presume we shall find very good reason for it) to understand this verse of some other CHILD *.

I now proceed to explain to you as distinctly as I can in a kind of paraphrase what I conceive to be the true interpretation of my text.

When Ahaz, doubting and irresolute, declined to ask of God a *Sign* of his deliverance; the prophet, deeming his infidelity incurable, and disdaining, as it were, farther conference with a prince who by this perverse unbelief was become unworthy his concern, solemnly addresses himself to the whole house of David. “Hear ye now, O house of David, is it a “small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my “God also?” Is it not enough that ye neglect and despise the

* That the prophet here intends a different child from that spoken of in the fourteenth and fifteenth verses seems likely, because, 1st. if he had meant the same child he would probably have expressed himself by the verb in the third person here, as he had already done in the fifteenth verse (thus, *for before he shall know*) this would have left no room for doubt about his meaning. 2dly. If he had rejected this mode of expression, yet surely he would have denoted the same child by the same term in the fourteenth and sixteenth verses. But בן in the former properly signifies SON, and נער in the latter CHILD. This change of terms seems to imply a difference of persons.

the admonitions and exhortations of your teachers, and scornfully reject those who labour to instruct and reform you? But will ye by your obstinate unbelief provoke the displeasure of your God? Will no warnings awake, no kindneses soften, no promises persuade you? Have ye forgotten God's tender mercies of old? Has he not "sworn by himself that he will "never fail David?" Or think ye that his arm is waxed short, and that his power and providence are no longer able to protect you against your insulting enemies? Has he not said, that "the seed of David shall endure for ever, and that his throne "shall be as the days of heaven?" and can ye now fear that his house shall be extinct, and his throne filled by a stranger, *the son of TAREAL*? Your unbelief may provoke God to anger, but it can never defeat his purpose. Your obstinacy may call down his judgements upon yourselves, but know notwithstanding that the line of David shall never fail till the *promised seed* shall come. And now (though your unbelief makes you little worthy of this grace from an offended God, yet) he will not only condescend to inform you more fully concerning the *Birth and Character* of that extraordinary person; but out of compassion to your weakness he will meet your dangers with his protecting arm, and your incredulity with a *Sign*, which may and ought to convince you, that he is ever true and faithful to his promise.

"Behold, *in the Fulness of Time*, a VIRGIN shall conceive and "bear a SON, and shall call his Name IMMANUEL." This

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illustrious

illustrious offspring of David shall not come into the world in the ordinary course of human generation; He shall be born of a *pure Virgin*, and shall eminently be the *Seed of the Woman*. He shall be too, what his name imports, GOD with US. Though his divine nature infinitely transcends the weak and perishing constitution of man, yet he shall vouchsafe under a human form to *visit, instruct, protect and govern* the children and household of his *Servant David*. His exalted perfections indeed may well be supposed to be exempt from human frailties; yet he shall not assume that privilege. He shall not only appear in fashion as a man, but he shall humble himself under the infirmities of our nature. He shall not even be a stranger to the weaknesses of childhood. “Butter and honey shall he eat *that* he may know to refuse the evil and choose the good.” His infancy shall require to be nursed with the same tender care as that of the frail offspring of man; and the same mild and delicate food shall be necessary to his growth in *stature and wisdom*. This humble and affectionate condescension may well seem to you strange and unaccountable. It is indeed *wonderful*; but neither *impossible*, nor *incredible*. For by this *Sign*, which God himself now holds out to you, ye may assuredly know that this exalted person, this *promised Seed*, shall in his appointed time graciously vouchsafe to bless his people with this divine visitation. “Before A CHILD shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her Kings.” In
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less time than A CHILD can be begotten, born, and become capable of distinguishing good from evil, those two kings, who now menace you with instant and apparently unavoidable destruction, shall lose both, their kingdoms and their lives. If this come not to pass, then say that the Lord hath not spoken by me. But when ye see your deliverance, now so hopeless, accomplished, both in time and circumstances, according to my word, it will then be the indispensable duty both of you and your children, with humble and implicit confidence, to expect, and look forward to, God's appointed time for displaying to the world this mysterious dispensation.

Thus it appears that my text consists of two distinct parts. The two first verses contain an express and literal prediction of the *Birth* and *Character* of Christ; the last verse holds out a prophetic *Sign*, whose completion (so soon to take place) should give full assurance to Ahaz and the house of David that the preceding prophecy concerning the Messiah should in due time be punctually fulfilled.

It was not then in the prophet's intention to struggle longer with the perverse and unconquerable incredulity of Ahaz and his house. It was comparatively of small importance to allay *their* fears, or to demonstrate to *Them* the certainty of a deliverance which was almost immediately to be accomplished. But this illustrious prediction of the *Birth* of the MESSIAH was of high and unspeakable consequence, not only to the house of David, but to the general interests of religion in all

succeeding ages. And it was with the utmost propriety that the prophet rested the evidence and expectation of it upon a deliverance, which impotence and despair had then represented as utterly hopeless and incredible.

That this is the true interpretation of my text will farther appear from what follows. The prophet concludes his discourse to Ahaz with denouncing upon him and his people, notwithstanding their deliverance from their present danger, grievous afflictions for their wickedness and unbelief. No sooner is their interview ended than the prophet is commanded by God himself to take a great roll, and to *write* in it concerning MAHER-SHALAL-HASH-BAZ. This is manifestly the CHILD alluded to in the last verse of my text; and his name importing to make haste to the spoil, and run swiftly to the prey, he is evidently a symbolical promise that the enemies of Judah shall soon become a spoil and a prey. The writing is an express republication of the prophetic *Sign* held out to the house of David in the last verse of my text; which is here with great solemnity *recorded*, and *attested* by faithful witnesses, Uriah the priest, and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah. This *attested Record* is meant, not only to mark this prophetic *Sign* with peculiar distinction, but to be a standing evidence to the house of David that God proposed it to them at a time when the destruction of the confederate kings was highly improbable. This *Record* contains an account of Isaiah's going in unto the prophets, his prediction that she shall bear a son, whose
name

name, by God's especial direction, must be called MAHER-SHAL-LAL-HASH-BAZ; and lastly, his recital of the prophetic *Sign* held out in the last verse of my text, that "before MAHER-SHAL-LAL-HASH-BAZ shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that Ahaz abhors shall be forsaken of both her kings;" or as it is here somewhat differently, but more definitely, expressed, "before he shall have knowledge to cry, my Father and my Mother, the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria shall be taken away before the king of Assyria *."

How exactly this prophetic *Sign* had it's completion appears from the history of these transactions in the books of kings and chronicles; there we find that about the end of Jotham's reign the confederate kings of Syria and Samaria were making preparations to invade Judah; that the invasion (which gave occasion to this remarkable interview between Ahaz and Isaiah) actually took place in the beginning of Ahaz's reign; that about the third year of Ahaz, Rezin the king of Syria was slain, his capital Damascus was taken, and an end was put to his kingdom; that the kingdom of Samaria was invaded, her towns and provinces wasted and plundered, and many of her inhabitants were carried away into captivity by the KING OF ASSYRIA:

* That IMMANUEL born of a VIRGIN was not in any sense intended as a *Sign*, either to Ahaz or the House of David, of their approaching deliverance from their enemies, seems evident; because He is not so much as mentioned here, when the prophet in such solemn form is foretelling the speedy destruction of the confederate Kings both by a symbolical Infant, and in express words.

ASSYRIA: and that in the fourth year of Ahaz, Pekah the king of Samaria was perfidiously assassinated by his subject and successor Hoshea the son of Elah. so that the *Sign* which God had promised was literally and eminently complete before it was possible that MAHER-SHALAL-HASH-BAZ should have any rational use of language.

It is unnecessary to detain you longer by enlarging upon the consistency of the foregoing explication with the history of the times, or the particular circumstances of Isaiah's interview with Ahaz; this, I am persuaded, has abundantly appeared in the course of what has already been advanced. But I would remark, that this exposition is not more agreeable to the context than to the *common use* and *construction* of language; which seem to be strangely violated by almost every interpreter that considers the prophecy as meant to convince Ahaz of the certainty of his deliverance. When two propositions are connected by the word *FOR*, the latter is commonly understood to alledge some reason or ground of our assent to the former. In my text there are two distinct propositions, predicting two very different events; the *BIRTH* of *IMMANUEL* and the destruction of the confederate kings; the former in the fourteenth and fifteenth verses (where the fifteenth verse must evidently be considered as purely incidental, and as only a part of the principal proposition) and the latter in the sixteenth verse. These propositions are connected by the word *FOR*. And the prophet plainly expresses himself in this order,
— *IMMANUEL*

—IMMANUEL *shall be born of a VIRGIN*, FOR *the confederate kings shall speedily be destroyed*. — But Interpreters have unaccountably inverted this order, and understood the passage as if the prophet had said to Ahaz, — *Thou shalt assuredly be delivered, or the confederate kings shall speedily be destroyed*, FOR IMMANUEL *shall be born of a VIRGIN*. — This remark needs no comment.

I will therefore only observe farther, that, if the interpretation now offered to you is admitted, we need not have recourse to the doctrine of accommodation in order to vindicate St. Matthew; since he only applies literally to CHRIST, what so many centuries before was literally predicted of him.



